

Message Text

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ACTION HEW-04

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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6491

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DEPT. PASS SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION, INTERNATIONAL STAFF

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SWEL, AS

SUBJECT: MEDIBANK PROGRAM

REF: STATE 206820

1. MEDIBANK WAS LAUNCHED JULY 1, 1975, AND NO CHANGES HAVE BEEN MADE TO ORIGINAL GOVERNMENT PLAN. ALL STATES, EXCEPT NEW SOUTH WALES, HAVE NOW JOINED THE HOSPITAL SIDE OF MEDIBANK. NO DEFINITE DATE HAS BEEN SET, BUT N.S.W. IS EXPECTED TO JOIN HOSPITAL SIDE IN 1976.

2. A\$1,445 MILLION (APPROX. US\$1,864 MILLION) WAS ALLOCATED IN FY76 BUDGET FOR OPERATION OF MEDIBANK. THIS AMOUNT INCLUDES A\$615 MILLION (US\$793 MILLION) FOR MEDICAL AND OPTOMETRICAL BENEFITS AND A\$822 MILLION (US\$1060 MILLION) FOR HOSPITAL BENEFITS. OPPOSITION SPOKESMAN ON SOCIAL SECURITY HAS ATTACKED THIS FIGURE AS "ABSURED AND MISLEADING" AND THAT COST WOULD "GO RIGHT UP OFF THE GRAPH". THIS STATEMENT BASED ON FACT THAT APPLICATIONS FOR MEDICAL BENEFITS ALONE ARE BEING RECEIVED AT A RATE OF 800,000 PER WEEK, 25 PCT. MORE THAN ONE MONTH AGO AND AVERAGE CLAIM HAS RISEN BY MORE THAN 25 PCT. FROM A\$8.71 TO A\$11.18.

3. MOST MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS ARE ADHERING TO SCHEDULE OF FEES. APPROXIMATELY 44 PCT. ARE "BULK BILLING" MEDIBANK (AGAINST THE ADVICE OF THE AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL

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ASSOCIATION). THE REMAINDER CONTINUE TO BILL PATIENTS

DIRECT, WHO IN TURN CLAIM REFUND (85 PCT. OF SCHEDULED FEE) FROM MEDIBANK. SCHEDULED FEE FOR CONSULTATION AT PRESENT A\$6.50, REBATE FROM MEDIBANK A\$5.55. THERE HAVE BEEN SOME REPORTED CASES OF DOCTORS CHARGING PATIENTS "BOOKING FEE" UP TO A\$5.00, THEN BULK BILLING MEDIBANK FOR CONSULTATION FEE. GOA WARNED THAT IT PREPARED TO INTRODUCE LEGISLATION AGAINST DOCTORS OR CHEMISTS EXPLOITING MEDIBANK SCHEME.

4. ALTHOURH IT HAD EARLIER PLANNED TO SCRAPP MEDIBANK IF IT CAME INTO POWER, OPPOSITION RECENTLY ADMITTED THAT "IT IS PROBABLY TOO LATE". LEADER OF OPPOSITION STATED THAT IF IT CAME INTO POWER IT WOULD EXAMINE MEDIBANK "WITH THE OBJECTIVE OF PRESERVING CHOICE AND THE HIGHEST-QUALITY HEALTH SERVICES". IT HAS BEEN REPORTED THAT THE MOST LIKELY AREA OF CHANGE WOULD BE THE HOSPITAL SIDE, WHICH IS THE MOST EXPENSIVE AND MOST DIFFICULT TO ADMINISTER. IN SHADOW BUDGET PRESENTED BY LEADER OF OPPOSITION, NO CHANGE WAS MADE TO A\$1445 MILLION APPROPRIATION AND LEADER REPORTEDLY TOLD PRESS REPORTER THAT "FOR PRESENT PLANNING PURPOSES, THE OPPOSITION WAS ASSUMING MEDIBANK WOULD CONTINUE."

5. EMBASSY IS POUCHING SEVERAL PRESS REPORTS ON VARIOUS ASPECTS OF MEDIBANK DIRECT TO SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION, INTERNATIONAL DIVISION.

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